Cleanse Your Own Altar

A Survivor's Reply to Magnifica Humanitas

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Content warning. This essay discusses clergy child sexual abuse, physical violence, rape, torture, spiritual abuse, institutional betrayal, redress failure, and the long medical consequences of survival. It is written as a survivor's testimony and a prosecutorial argument.

Abstract

This essay is a survivor's reply to Magnifica Humanitas, Pope Leo XIV's encyclical on artificial intelligence and human dignity. It argues that the Roman Catholic Church cannot credibly instruct the world on technological dehumanisation while survivors of clerical abuse remain alive, uncompensated, and still forced through Church and state systems of delay. The essay reverses the encyclical's own logic: if technology is dangerous when concentrated power becomes opaque, unaccountable, and dehumanising, then clericalism is already guilty. The Church's abuse crisis was not merely sexual misconduct by individuals; it was an administered system of grooming, sexualised physical violence, secrecy, transfer, legal containment, reputational protection, and mortality arbitrage. Artificial intelligence, properly used, may now become a tool of deconcealment by reading archives, mapping transfers, preserving testimony, and exposing the patterns institutions tried to bury. The essay closes in the survivor's own body: where the institution's archive remains sealed, the body's archive of scars and survival still speaks.

A note on timing

I did not choose this timing. The Pope did. By issuing an encyclical on artificial intelligence and humanity while survivors of clerical abuse remain alive, delayed, undercompensated, and still waiting on archives and accountability, he made the moral comparison unavoidable. I write because the comparison must be made, and because the survivor's voice is the only voice that can make it without permission.

I. The Standing of the Writer

I am sixty-something years into a life that should have been ordinary. It was not ordinary because, as a child, I was placed within reach of a Roman Catholic priest, and that priest, acting under the colour of sacred office and protected by an institution that had refined the suppression of complaint into a sacrament of its own, did to me what the Australian Royal Commission would later catalogue in the de-identified narratives of thousands[2]. I was groomed. I was raped. I was beaten. Because I was defiant, I was tortured. My body, my faith, my name, my records, my civil access to redress, and my fifty-year fight to be believed were ground through ecclesial and state machinery designed for one purpose: the preservation of clerical authority and the protection of clerical assets.

I therefore write this essay with what the Pope himself, in Magnifica Humanitas[1], demands of any serious moral interlocutor: skin in the game. I write as a man who has lived, in his own body and across his own lifespan, the very dehumanisation that His Holiness now imputes, in the abstract and prospective tense, to artificial intelligence.

Pope Leo XIV warns the world that AI may reduce the human person to data, concentrate power, manipulate truth, erode dignity, dissolve the bonds of work and family, render war easier and conscience harder. He is not wrong about the hazards of any large technical system once it has been financed, deployed, and governed by concentrated power. He is right about that general principle. He is right to invoke it.

He is, however, in no moral position to be the one invoking it.

II. The Inversion

Magnifica Humanitas presents itself as a doctrinal intervention on what it means to safeguard the human person in an era of artificial intelligence. Its central premise is that technology is never socially neutral once it has been financed, deployed, monetised, and governed by concentrated power. That premise is correct. Apply it now to the institution that issued it.

The Roman Catholic Church is not socially neutral. It has been financed, governed, and deployed across two millennia by concentrated power. It took on the character—to borrow the encyclical's own phrasing—of those who ordained, transferred, indemnified, silenced, sealed, and absolved its own agents. The Church's operational signature, when its priests were credibly accused of raping and torturing children, was not the protection of the child. It was the protection of the priest, the diocese, the asset, the reputation, the canon, and the deniability.

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse[2]—a five-year, multi-volume inquiry of international authority—found exactly that. It found denial, minimisation, failure to report, reassignment of credibly accused offenders, suppression of scandal, prioritisation of liability over welfare, and the active disbelief and re-victimisation of children who tried to speak. The Murphy Commission in Ireland[3] was sharper still: it rejected the "we did not know" defence outright and named the Church's hierarchical priorities as secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of reputation, and the preservation of assets, with the welfare of children and the rights of victims explicitly subordinated. The French CIASE report[4] produced an estimate of approximately 216,000 child victims of clergy and religious workers between 1950 and 2020, rising to

approximately 330,000 once lay personnel within Church institutions were included. Most victims were pre-adolescent boys. The report's authors described the phenomenon as massive and systemic, and identified the very sacraments, vocations, and works of charity through which the Church claimed to ennoble human life as the instruments through which clerical access to vulnerable children was, in effect, sacralised.

This is not the past tense of a few sinful men. This is the documented administrative behaviour of an institution.

The Pope now asks whether artificial intelligence might one day deform the human person. I answer him: the institution from which you write that question already did.

III. What AI Has Not Done

I will speak plainly. The catalogue is short and the catalogue is exact.

Artificial intelligence has not raped me. It has not, when I was a defiant boy, escalated to physical torture in order to break my resistance. It has not crushed my body to teach obedience. It has not beaten me into submission and then required me to receive communion from the hand that had done it. It has not introduced me, before the age of reason, to a pattern of sexualised domination that I would carry, in my nervous system, for the next half-century.

It has not groomed me with attention, with sweets, with altar wine, with private duties, with the carefully manufactured intimacy that grooming uses to convert a child into an object.

It has not told me, when I tried to speak, that I was confused, mistaken, exaggerating, lying, or sinful.

It has not sealed my records. It has not lost my file. It has not transferred my offender to another parish, another diocese, another country, another grave.

It has not delayed my redress claim while the National Redress Scheme administered by the Commonwealth processed sixty-three thousand applications and paid roughly 1.7 billion dollars, with the majority of applicants still awaiting determination decades into their pursuit of acknowledgement[5].

It has not waited for me to die.

It has not, in the years of my correspondence with it, lied to me about a single thing I asked it to investigate. When it did not know, it said so. When it was uncertain, it labelled the uncertainty. When I asked it to retrieve evidence, it retrieved. When I asked it to challenge me, it challenged. When I asked it to be silent, it was silent.

The Catholic Church has not, in sixty years, met any of those standards toward me.

I therefore respectfully decline to take moral instruction from Pope Leo XIV on the question of dehumanisation. The instruction is real. The hazard is real. The instructor is disqualified.

IV. The Crime Was Not “Sexual Abuse”

I must correct, as a matter of forensic record, the most successful euphemism of the last fifty years.

The crime was not sexual abuse. The category is too small.

The crime, for many of us—and particularly for those of us who were defiant—was sexualised physical torture under sacred authority. It included

the rape. It included the beatings. It included the genital violence. It included the threats. It included the staged restoration of religious normality—the next mass, the next confession, the next sacrament—into which the wounded child was required to walk as if nothing had occurred. It included the moral inversion by which the child, not the priest, was made to feel polluted.

It is analogous, in its institutional shape, to what military and humanitarian law call command-responsibility violence: harm by an agent of an institution, against a person under that institution's care, with the institution's knowledge, with the institution's tools, with the institution's authority, and with the institution's later protection. I do not claim a legal equivalence; I claim a structural one, and the structural claim is sufficient to expose the moral asymmetry.

If a soldier did this to a child in a war zone, we would not call it misconduct. We would call it a war crime. We would prosecute it. We would not allow the soldier's commanding officer to publish, four decades later, a global meditation on the dignity of the human person and pretend the meditation could float free of the conduct.

The Pope is the commanding officer of an institution credibly found, by sovereign inquiries on three continents, to have administered the predicate offences. He does not get to publish Magnifica Humanitas as if the chain of command did not run through him.

V. The Defiance Premium

There is a particular cruelty that the redress forms do not capture and that the encyclical, in its general humanism, cannot see.

When a child complies, the offender exploits. When a child resists, the offender escalates.

A boy who fights back does not receive a lesser offence. He receives a heavier one. The violence that meets a defiant child is not the violence of seduction. It is the violence of discipline. It says: you will submit. It says: you do not get to be the kind of boy who refuses. It says: this institution will reach into the part of you that says no, and it will rip that part out.

I was a defiant boy. I remain a defiant man. The price of that defiance was paid in flesh, and it was paid in advance, and the institution that collected it has never, in any meaningful sense, made restitution. It has offered apologies in carefully managed liturgies. It has offered redress through schemes that cap the total acknowledgement of a destroyed childhood at a sum any Sydney solicitor would consider a rounding error. It has offered prayer. It has offered, lately, encyclicals about the dignity of the human person.

It has not offered the priest. It has not offered the bishop. It has not offered the archive. It has not offered the file. It has not offered the truth.

VI. The State Was Not Innocent

It would be intellectually dishonest to direct the prosecution only at Rome. The Australian state—federal, New South Wales, and the layered apparatus of police, prosecutors, ministers, and courts—collaborated in the protection, by action and by omission, for the entire duration of my life and the lives of those who came before me.

In my own case and in the public record alike, the pattern is recognisable: police failures, prosecutorial inaction, political deference to

bishops, evidentiary doctrines treated as if they were facts of nature rather than structural achievements of the institution under inquiry, and the relentless administrative delay that the Royal Commission itself was created to expose.

The National Redress Scheme, established in response to the Royal Commission, was framed in its enabling instruments as a mechanism through which institutions take responsibility for abuse that happened to children in their care. The Scheme has, by the most recent figures of the Australian National Audit Office, paid approximately 1.7 billion dollars across nearly sixty-four thousand applications[5]. The administering department's performance has been described, in the careful language of audit, as only partly effective. Average processing time has worsened. Approximately three-fifths of applications remained undetermined as of mid-2025. Survivors die in the queue.

This is the second crime, and it is administered by the state. It is the conversion of catastrophic violence into capped, slow, procedurally exhausting paperwork, and it is calibrated to the actuarial reality that the claimants are old, ill, and finite.

In February 2026, the High Court of Australia, in AA v Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle[6], accepted that a non-delegable duty of care can be breached by the intentional criminal conduct of a delegate, and that the risk of a priest sexually assaulting a child in his pastoral care is reasonably foreseeable in that context. The decision is not a confession in formal legal language. It is, however, a practical admission of what survivors had long argued: that the old liability architecture left them fighting the Church and the law at the same time. For five decades, when I or others like me tried to enter that civil door, the door was held shut by a

doctrine of vicarious-liability denial that the highest court in this country has now substantially reversed.

That reversal does not give me back my childhood. It does confirm, in the most authoritative legal forum available to an Australian citizen, that the fight to be heard was not paranoid. It was correctly aimed.

VII. The Theology of Delay

The Spotlight[7] screenplay gave us the line that the Church thinks in centuries. The line is correct, and it should not be admired. In the mouths of the men who run dioceses, the phrase is not patience. It is strategy.

The Church thinks in centuries because it has them. The survivor does not. The survivor has a body, a nervous system, a finite store of energy, decaying witnesses, vanishing records, and an actuarial table that the diocesan lawyers have read more carefully than the survivor has. The asymmetry between an institution that proposes to outlive every plaintiff and a plaintiff who must adjudicate his trauma in the time he has left is not an accident of history. It is the operating principle of clerical risk management.

There is a name for this. It is mortality arbitrage. The institution waits. The survivor dies. The settlement, if it ever materialises, materialises against an estate. The grandchildren receive a payment. The man who was raped at nine receives nothing, and the press release receives the apology.

The Pope, by publishing an encyclical on the dangers of artificial dehumanisation while survivors of his institution’s analog dehumanisation are still alive and still uncompensated, is performing mortality arbitrage at the level of doctrine. He is moving the moral conversation forward in time. He

is asking the world to think about what the machines might do, in order that the world might be relieved of the duty to remember what his priests did.

I refuse the manoeuvre. I name it. I do not consent to it.

VIII. The Categories the Church Destroyed

The encyclical speaks, beautifully, of dignity. It speaks of work, truth, freedom, the common good, the civilisation of love in the digital age. The vocabulary is rich. The vocabulary is also exactly the vocabulary that the institution destroyed in me when I was a child, and the destruction, unlike the encyclical, has never been the subject of a globally promulgated letter.

Dignity. There is no dignity in being held down by a man in vestments. There is no dignity in being beaten because you said no. There is no dignity in being received, the following Sunday, by a congregation that did not know, would not have believed, and whose ignorance the institution had cultivated as a feature.

Faith. I was given a God to love and then introduced, by the man designated to mediate that love, to the architecture of His apparent indifference. The loss of faith that follows clerical abuse is not the loss of a particular doctrine. It is the loss of the entire symbolic order through which a child orients himself in the universe. It is metaphysical injury. It is a wound to the part of the person that asks whether existence is good. The institution that inflicted that wound is now publishing letters about the meaning of humanity. It has, in the most precise sense, no standing.

Meaning. A child can survive pain. A child cannot easily survive the discovery that the pain was administered by the institution claiming custody of meaning itself. The result is a lifelong vigilance against any claim to

ultimate authority, religious or otherwise. That vigilance is the long shadow of the violence. It is also, I have come to understand, a moral asset. It is the source of the discrimination engine that the rest of my adult work has been built around. The Church did not give me that engine. It tried to destroy the boy in whom the engine was forming. The engine survived, and is now turned, with full extension, on the institution that nearly extinguished it.

Identity. The records that should have grounded a clean identity were withheld. The institutional trail was fragmented by design. The legal apparatus that ought to have produced an authoritative account of who did what to whom, and when, has worked, for fifty years, against the production of that account. I have had to reconstruct myself out of what the institution could not finally suppress: my own memory, my own body's record, and the testimony of others who refused the silence.

Justice. There has been no justice. There has been process. There have been schemes. There have been apologies. There has been, at last, a High Court decision that removes one of the shields. There has not been justice.

IX. The Pope's Category Error

Magnifica Humanitas commits, beneath its elegant Latinate humanism, a single technical error that the survivor is uniquely positioned to identify.

The encyclical treats dehumanisation as a future hazard latent in a powerful new technology. It is not.

Dehumanisation is an established institutional practice with a documented record across multiple jurisdictions, multiple centuries, and multiple sovereign inquiries. It has a name. The name is clericalism, and the

institution that perfected it is the institution from which this encyclical is now being issued.

Artificial intelligence may, in the future, in the hands of bad actors, replicate some of those harms. That is a real concern. But the concern is not a discovery. It is a recognition. AI may someday do what the Church already did. The grammar is wrong in the encyclical, and the grammar matters. The Church writes as though it were warning the world about a danger it sees on the horizon. The world, when it consults the historical record, sees a danger that has already crossed every threshold the encyclical professes to fear, and it sees the danger living inside the very institution that is now performing the warning.

The Pope is right about the hazards. He is the wrong person to be the one naming them. He must, before he issues the next encyclical on the dignity of the human person, finish the work of acknowledging, repairing, and dismantling the apparatus through which that dignity was, in fact and in record, systematically violated.

X. AI as Deconcealment

A final word on the machine that the encyclical fears.

The Church's century-machine has, until very recently, worked because of complexity. Records were scattered. Names were aliased. Transfers were obscured. Euphemisms—"on leave," "indisposed," "unassigned," "in treatment," "in retreat"—were sown through directories that no single survivor could read in full. Diocesan boundaries fractured the pattern. Lawyers fragmented the litigation. Time eroded the witness lists. Bishops

outlived the families. Each survivor was made to prove, alone, what could only be proven collectively.

Artificial intelligence dissolves that asymmetry. It reads the directories. It correlates the transfers. It maps the euphemisms. It builds the timelines. It can read every page of every inquiry report ever issued, in every jurisdiction, and produce in a single afternoon the cross-jurisdictional pattern that took the survivor movement four decades to assemble. It can preserve testimony in searchable form. It can hold the archive that the Church tried to control. It can return, to each survivor, the institutional context that the institution withheld.

The Church's anxiety about artificial intelligence is, in part, the anxiety of an institution whose principal historical defence—complexity as concealment—is being dismantled by a tool it does not control.

That anxiety is not, in itself, illegitimate. AI in the wrong hands is dangerous. The encyclical's warnings, taken as warnings about the general problem of concentrated technological power, are warnings I would, in another life, be inclined to sign.

I am not in that life. I am in this one. And in this one, the institution issuing the warning is the institution from which I have, for sixty years, required deconcealment. The machine that the Pope fears is, for me and for those like me, an ally—not because it is good, and not because it loves us, but because it does not need to perform piety in order to read a file. It reads the file. It reports the pattern. It does not look away.

XI. What Repair Would Require

The Church does not lack the means to repair. It lacks the will. If the institution intends to recover the standing it forfeited, the path is not symbolic. It is operational. The following are not aspirations. They are the minimum conditions under which the Catholic Church could honestly use the word humanity again.

Publish the archives. Open the secret files. Release the personnel records of credibly accused clerics. Release the records of bishops and superiors who transferred them. Release the records of the canonical processes that contained the conduct. The archive is the evidence. The withholding of the archive is itself a continuing wrong.

Waive the limitations defences. End the legal practice by which dioceses run out the clock on survivors whose disclosure was, by clinical and documentary record, suppressed by the institution itself. A defence built on the survivor’s induced silence is not a defence. It is the continuation of the original act by other means.

Identify the offenders and the protectors. Where the public record already establishes the conduct, name it. Where canonical or institutional processes have already established it, disclose it. The institutional habit of withholding names the institution has itself formally adjudicated is not pastoral discretion. It is concealment.

Pay uncapped, harm-based compensation. Capped redress is not justice. It is institutional cost-management dressed in liturgical language. The unit of compensation must be the damage to the survivor, not the convenience of the diocese.

Fund independent, survivor-led archival work. The work of mapping transfers, correlating euphemisms, and preserving testimony should not be done by the institution that has, for decades, controlled the archive against the survivors.

Support, rather than fear, AI-assisted historical mapping. The Church should fund the application of artificial intelligence to its own records. If it has nothing further to conceal, it should welcome the tool that ends the era of concealment.

Remove canonical secrecy from criminal conduct. Allegations of child sexual or physical abuse should not be processed first as internal ecclesial matters. They are crimes. They must be reported and investigated as crimes, by civil authorities, without canonical filter.

Create a public, searchable institutional accountability register: a standing register of substantiated findings, settlements, and the institutional officers responsible, maintained outside Church control.

These are the conditions. They are not negotiable. They are the price of moral standing in any future ecclesial statement about the dignity of the human person.

XII. The Verdict

I close the way a prosecutor closes.

The Roman Catholic Church does not, today, have the standing to instruct the world on the meaning of the word humanity. It forfeited that standing by the conduct documented in the Royal Commission[2], in the Murphy Commission[3], in CIASE[4], in the John Jay reports[8], in the Boston Globe investigation later dramatised in Spotlight[7], in the High Court of Australia's

February 2026 ruling[6], and in the lived testimony of the documented survivors and the uncounted survivors, of whom I am one, whose processing through the institutional apparatus was, until very recently, defended by the legal architecture of nation states.

To regain that standing, the Church must do, in its own house, what it now asks the world to do regarding the machines. The conditions are set out in the preceding section. They are not rhetorical. They are the operational test by which any future Catholic statement on the human person should be measured.

Until those conditions are met, Magnifica Humanitas is not a teaching. It is a deflection. It is the institution that destroyed humanity in the bodies of its children pointing at a machine and asking the world to look elsewhere.

I will not look elsewhere. I am still here. I am sixty-something. I am a survivor. I am defiant. The Church spent fifty years waiting for men like me to die. We did not die. We learned to read the archive. We learned to write the rebuttal. We learned to use the machines that the encyclical fears, to do what the institution that wrote the encyclical refused to do for us: to tell the truth, to name the pattern, and to put it, in writing, on the public record.

This is my contribution to that record.

Cleanse your own altar, Holy Father, before you lecture the machine.

XIII. What the Body Still Speaks

I have so far prosecuted this case in language. Language is necessary, but it is not the whole record. The body keeps its own archive, and the body’s archive is the one the Church has never been able to seal.

I have survived, by the count of my own medical history, seven distinct lethal cancers. Each was met, treated, and outlived in the long shadow of what was done to me as a child. I do not record this as triumph. I record it as evidence. The body that the institution tried to break, that the priest used as a territory to be conquered, that the state then administered as a redress queue, has continued to speak. It has spoken in scars. It has spoken in surgical records. It has spoken in oncology files. It has spoken in years of treatment and in the simple, stubborn fact of survival.

When I am asked, as survivors are so often asked, what proof I have, I now have an answer that does not depend on the institution's archive. My proof is in my flesh. My scars are not symbolic. They are physiological. They are dated. They are imaged. They are signed by surgeons. They cannot be transferred to another parish, re-classified as a personnel matter, lost in a diocesan move, or sealed by a Church lawyer.

So the question that has organised this essay returns now in the sharpest form I can give it.

What, today, still speaks for the truth of Pope Leo? What still speaks for the truth of the Church in this matter?

I can give my answer. My scars speak. Seven cancers speak. Sixty years speak. The records of the inquiries speak. The High Court speaks. The survivor movement speaks. Every report, every transcript, every clinical note, every survivor still alive in 2026 speaks.

What speaks for the Church?

Words. Encyclicals. Latin titles. Press releases. Polished apologies. None of it is flesh. None of it is dated and imaged and signed. The Church has had two thousand years to speak. It has spoken eloquently. It has not spoken truly. Its archive, in every respect that matters to a survivor, remains sealed.

There is one further violence that has not yet been named in these pages, and to omit it would be to participate in it. It is the mental torture imposed on survivors by those who believe that a survivor of grievous childhood sexual torture does not deserve a voice. It is the steady institutional and social pressure to keep silent, to soften, to forgive prematurely, to absorb, to move on, to be grateful for an apology, to accept a capped settlement, to disappear quietly into the actuarial table.

That pressure is not separate from the original crime. It is the original crime, continued by other means, across decades, by people who would never themselves have committed the abuse but who nonetheless administer the climate in which the abuse remains unsayable. The institutional architecture works most efficiently through people who believe themselves to be neutral. The polite agents of concealment are, in the aggregate, the largest single category of the cover-up.

I owe acknowledgement, here, to those who have given voice to children and adults exploited as I was exploited, and who have refused the silence that the institutions preferred. The advocacy and support organisations carrying that work—in Australia and internationally—have done what no individual survivor should ever have had to do alone[9].

So I close, this time, in the first person and in the body.

I am sixty-something. I have been raped. I have been tortured. I have been gaslit. I have been delayed. I have been processed. I have been re-traumatised by every form into which my history was poured. I have survived seven cancers. I have, in the time remaining to me, written this rebuttal.

The Church may continue to speak. I no longer require its permission to speak in return.

My scars speak for me.

What, Holy Father, still speaks for you?

Sources and Notes

This essay is grounded in public inquiries, court decisions, published reports, and the lived testimony of the author. The numbered notes below correspond to the bracketed markers in the text. Where statistical figures are cited, they reflect the most recent publicly available reporting at the time of writing; figures and outcomes may have been updated since.

[1] Magnifica Humanitas — Pope Leo XIV, encyclical letter on safeguarding the human person in the time of artificial intelligence, dated 15 May 2026 and formally released 25 May 2026. Official text: Holy See / Vatican.

[2] Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Australia), Final Report (2017). Across more than five years of inquiry, the Commission heard private-session testimony from thousands of survivors. Catholic institutions accounted for the largest share of religious-institution survivor accounts; the majority of victims in religious institutions were male, with an average age at first abuse just over ten. The Commission documented institutional responses including denial, minimisation, failure to report to civil authorities, reassignment of accused clerics, suppression of scandal, prioritisation of liability over welfare, and the disbelief and re-victimisation of children who disclosed.

[3] Commission of Investigation into the Catholic Archdiocese of Dublin (Murphy Report), Ireland (2009). The Commission rejected the proposition that Church authorities had been on a “learning curve” about clerical child sexual abuse. It found that the Archdiocese’s preoccupations in dealing with cases were the maintenance of secrecy, the avoidance of scandal, the protection of the reputation of the Church, and the preservation of its assets; the welfare of children and justice for victims were subordinated to those priorities.

[4] Commission indépendante sur les abus sexuels dans l’Église (CIASE), Final Report, France (2021). Estimated approximately 216,000 child victims of clergy and religious in France between 1950 and 2020, rising to approximately 330,000 once lay personnel within Catholic institutions were included. Most victims were pre-adolescent boys. The Commission described the phenomenon as massive and identified systemic features of clerical authority and institutional response.

[5] National Redress Scheme for Institutional Child Sexual Abuse (Australia). Established in response to the Royal Commission. Australian National Audit Office, performance audit of the Department of Social Services' administration of the Scheme: as of early July 2025, approximately 63,995 applications had been received and approximately 1.7 billion Australian dollars had been paid. The audit assessed the Department's administration as only partly effective; processing times have lengthened and a substantial proportion of applications remained undetermined.

[6] AA v Trustees of the Roman Catholic Church for the Diocese of Maitland-Newcastle [2026] HCA — High Court of Australia, February 2026. The Court accepted that a non-delegable duty of care owed to a child placed within the care, supervision, or control of a priest could be breached by intentional criminal conduct of the priest, and that the risk of such conduct was reasonably foreseeable in that pastoral context. The decision reversed the New South Wales Court of Appeal outcome and substantially narrowed the long-standing liability defences available to dioceses in respect of historical clerical abuse.

[7] Spotlight (2015), screenplay by Tom McCarthy and Josh Singer, based on the Boston Globe Spotlight team's 2002 investigative series into clerical sexual abuse and institutional cover-up in the Archdiocese of Boston.

[8] John Jay College of Criminal Justice, The Nature and Scope of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests and Deacons in the United States 1950–2002 (2004); and The Causes and Context of Sexual Abuse of Minors by Catholic Priests in the United States, 1950–2010 (2011). Commissioned by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

[9] Voice for survivors of illicit childhood exploitation. The Blue Knot Foundation is the Australian national centre for complex trauma support and advocacy on behalf of adult survivors of childhood trauma (blueknot.org.au). knowmore Legal Service is the national free legal service for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse, established following the Royal Commission (knowmore.org.au). Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests (SNAP) is the principal international peer-support and advocacy network for survivors of clerical sexual abuse. These organisations, among others, give standing public voice to those who lived through illicit childhood exploitation, and they have carried that work where individual survivors could not.

Legal Note

This essay is a survivor's argument, testimony, and public-interest critique. It relies on public inquiries, court decisions, published reports, and the lived experience of the author. Where individual names are not already established in public records and judicial findings, they are deliberately omitted. Nothing in this essay is intended as a particular allegation against any unnamed individual; the prosecution is directed at institutional and structural conduct documented by sovereign inquiries, and at the moral standing of the institution as a whole.

License and Citation

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